

BEING IS BECOMING

Say your name. Listen to someone else call you. It's a good sound because it singles you out from everyone else. It's yours alone. It is a word that you have recognized ever since you can remember, a sound you have always responded to, but who is the individual who is behind that name? Who are you? Perhaps you're short with dark hair and big brown eyes, or you're almost skinny with a sandy crew cut. And you are much more. Right now you may not even realize how much more there is to you. You may be aware of the great variety of feelings and thoughts and sighs and screams that come from different parts of you, but so far you don't see much rhyme and reason to it all -- or do you? All the parts don't fit together into a single whole, a person that you know is YOU, that you can be proud of and happy to live with. The time must come, though when you can hear your name and know what it represents. You must know yourself completely and be proud of ME. There is no easy formula for drawing all the strings together into one well-knit knot. I know who I am, but I can remember the time when there were so many versions of me that I never knew what to expect from me next. Knowing what to expect next is an important part of being yourself, too. You can't live with a person who is completely unpredictable, or with a will and heart which are always pulling in opposite directions. You can't live with a person who always does things that confuse you, or make you ashamed. It is great to live with someone you really love and understand. Yet, there is no formula for becoming such a person because each one must work it out for themself.

I could tell you how I did it, but looking back I see no clear pattern; I just see life -- life, changing, retreating, advancing -- and me.

It is even difficult to set a goal, to visualize the person you would like to be, because, it's easy to idolize characteristics that can never be you. Having a cool car, succeeding at sports, winning the class election, earning lots of money, getting good grades -- boy, if you could do these things you would be a wonderful person, the person you want to be. Not so! These things do not make you and may not even go well with a you who is still floundering around, unsure of who you are. All right then. I'll be friendly to everyone, study hard, groom myself nicely, keep a cheerful attitude, treat my family well, imitate Christ in everything; then I'll be my ideal, the person I want to be. No. These are all good goals, but to attain them you would have to be either super-human or a phoney. Being you is much more simple and much more of a mystery than stacking up a lot of good qualities.

Becoming you is establishing very basic ideals, very basic responses which will serve you in your contact with life. When you are really alive, "with it," life's every experience is a confrontation with the opportunities of living in a great, wide, growing world.

Brushing your teeth in the morning, dropping your books at the bus stop, getting the right answers in algebra or geometry, inviting a new girl to join your group, exploding at your little brother, asking the girl down the street to the dance, helping around the house, reading a good book, working things out with your folks; each of these things is a step in the formation of the real you. That's why all these actions often loom larger in your mind and emotions when they happen than they do later when you can put them in a larger framework.

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when you can

Tension, conflict, embarrassment, chagrin; each is a test to see if the real you is prepared to take a step forward. You won't always emerge from crises as the more successful, more loveable person; but if you are striving to be the person who you know you must be, you will emerge each time a more confident and more secure person.

You won't become the permanent you this week, this month, or even this year. Still, you must begin becoming you today, and one bright morning a few hard years from now you will discover that YOU KNOW WHO YOU ARE and WHERE YOU ARE GOING. You will be predictable and acceptable; being yourself will be a fairly clear matter and, having arrived, you will like yourself. Don't be too surprised; don't wonder why you weren't aware of all this sooner, because the end is only reaping the fruit of the struggle taking place right now.

When you are least sure of yourself, when you are least prepared to face it, life comes tumbling toward you. No one understands you, nor do you understand yourself. It seems half the time you are embarrassed, hurt, or in trouble. The balance of the time you are on cloud 9 and about to land with a thump. Rarely do things roll along smoothly. No advice will help you to make it turn out differently. The girl in your neighborhood who seems to have all the answers can't tell you either. Chances are she is as bewildered about herself as you are; and by the way, your bewilderment doesn't show on the outside any more than hers does.

Being yourself means changing a little every day. It involves a lot of hammering and tempering in the process of shaping the complete you. Sometimes it is difficult because you are so unsure; the only guideline to follow then is BE. Keep being, keep living, keep loving, keep growing, keep changing. Do it gladly with gusto, for in teenage to be yourself is to participate fully in the struggle to become yourself.

When you are still on the way, you are not yet someone; you are busy becoming a whole person, a "glued together," person. When finally, you know yourself well, accept and love yourself completely, you will have arrived. You will no longer wear the tag "teen" -- you will BE; you will have given your name a person to stand behind it.

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